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ABSTRACT

Strategic planning is a rational, private-sector planning model that results in a document outlining the "ideal vision" for the individual, organization, and society. Public schools gained familiarity with strategic planning through the American Association of School Administrators, who sponsor the activity as a combination of rational process and discipline helping to define education's niche in a chaotic environment. A key ingredient is meaningful participation of all relevant stakeholders, including school staff, parents, business representatives, political leaders, and sometimes students. Based on Michel Foucault's interdisciplinary efforts to discuss the power/knowledge concept, this paper critically examines the messages surrounding the strategic planning process and the actual published results of 88 school districts across the country. Viewing strategic planning as a discursive practice founded on "rules of right," the paper explores how the texts represent social reconstructions of power/knowledge relationships within the school community. Results suggest that strategic plan language creates notions of schooling, education, teaching, learning, and success and solidifies the practices and power relationships surrounding these notions. The plan becomes the subject, and the practices and people become the objects. Although greater participation in schools and schooling is desirable, it is debatable whether strategic planning has helped school communities develop increased democratic practices. (11 references) (MLH)

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STRATEGIC PLANNING: LOOKING THROUGH THE LENS OF FOUCAULT

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"Our children are the message we send to the future."

"We are preparing productive citizens for the 21st Century."

"The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths are not to be found, but made, and the activity of making them, changes both the maker and the destination."

Introduction

The words are seductive, filled with great promise. The texts are slick presentations on fine quality paper, filled with graphics and photos. One folder even contains a "prospectus." The texts I refer to are known as **strategic plans**. They have been prepared by school districts across the country, typically as a five year blueprint for guiding the local schools into the year 2000.

Following my interest in the means of production of knowledge and the relationship of that knowledge to society, I undertake a critical examination of the messages surrounding this planning process and the actual published results of these community dialogues about schools and schooling. I am looking at strategic planning as a discursive practice: a process of communication that restructures what we "know" about schools and schooling.

I take my understanding of a discursive practice from the work of the late Michel Foucault (1972), a French history professor who worked across the disciplinary boundaries of history, philosophy, and politics to discuss the concept of power/knowledge. He interprets discourse as writing, reading, and oral exchange that is more than a group of signs. Foucault suggests that our discourse, or signs, actually become practice that, in turn, form the objects of which we speak. He views practices as events, struggles, and conflicts "within which power and knowledge are simultaneously

diffused" (Lemert & Gillan, 1982, p. 135). In relating power to knowledge, Foucault talks about a body of anonymous rules, called the "rules of right," which govern what sort of talk can be taken seriously and thus, limit power. If then, we examine strategic planning as a discursive practice, we must ask how the texts represent social reconstructions of power/knowledge relationships within the school community.

For this study, strategic plans and follow-up surveys from 88 school districts across the country form the data base. I ask the following questions:

- What newly reconstituted "realities" or regimes of truth are produced in the language of these strategic plans?
- How will the "truths" contained in the language of these plans define and produce reality for students?
- How is the knowledge/power relationship defined for students, teachers, administrators, and community members?

I begin by describing strategic planning as it is used in school districts around the United States. Then, I explain why Foucault's analytical structure is appropriate for analyzing the practice and results of strategic planning in schools. Following that, I examine the social and historical context surrounding a perceived need for this process, describe the data collected, and the methodology used to analyze the data. And finally, following the challenge of Foucault, I examine the notion that "people know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does" (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983, p.187).

What is Strategic Planning?

Strategic planning is a rational planning model, originating primarily in the private sector, which results in a document that outlines the "ideal vision" for the individual, the organization, and the society (Kaufman & Herman, 1991a, p. 4). In their recent book on strategic planning in education, Kaufman and Herman (1992), review over fifteen descriptions of this process and deduce that it is a planning method for improving organizational pay-offs and consequences in the face of competition, obstacles, or adversity" (p. 12).

Public schools gained familiarity with and expertise in strategic planning through the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), an international professional organization for school administrators. AASA advertises strategic planning as "a concentration of school district efforts and resources on agreed upon goals" (AASA brochure). The organization suggests that, through strategic planning, a microcosm of the school community defines their common beliefs and reason for being and then identifies the key objectives and strategies that help "control their future--to direct, rather than be tossed, by the winds of change" (AASA brochure). To assist school districts, this professional organization sponsors a series of three certificated workshops for learning the strategic planning process. They also facilitate a network of school districts engaged in the process, and offer access to a private consulting service. Their brochure for the strategic planning network identifies the relationship with the private consulting group as a "partnership."

The primary strategic planning consultant sponsored by this professional association, Dr. Bill Cook, describes strategic planning as a combination of rational process and discipline that helps define the niche of education in a chaotic environment (Cook, 1988).

He states:

> The discipline includes the vital ingredients of the plan itself; the process is the organizational dynamic through which the vital ingredients are derived. Both the discipline and the process are aimed at total concentration of the organization's resources on mutually predetermined measurable outcomes. (p. 93)

A key element of an effective strategic planning process is meaningful participation of all relevant stakeholders in the organization (Cook, 1988; Kaufman & Herman, 1992; Mauriel, 1989). One school district, a participant in this study, describes this effort as:

> (including) people of good will from all constituencies who examine, in an open, unrestricted forum, all aspects of the organization. Strategic planning emphasizes common interests rather than special interests, and its decisions are reached through consensus rather than majority rule. In majority rule, someone always loses. In consensus decision-making, compromises are made for the good of the whole.

Generally, stakeholders, or participants in the strategic planning process, are from a variety of sectors in the school community. The group may include teachers, administrators, classified staff, parents, business representatives, political leaders, and in some cases, students.

The strategic planning activities recommended by planners (Cook, 1988, Kaufman & Herbert, 1992) are, for the most part, similar to private sector models. Stakeholders identify a set of beliefs and a mission. An internal and external analysis of the organization and the community provides data for decision-making. Objectives, usually stated as specific outcomes, are agreed upon next and strategies for achieving those objectives are defined. At this point, most strategic planning groups break into smaller groups

or activate new groups in order to develop action plans. The action plans are then developed to govern the activities of the people in the organization. The action plans may also define the outcomes which are evaluated for progress toward the mission and objectives. Specific timelines, budgets, and responsible agents frequently are identified as part of action plans.

Why Foucault?

The choice of a Foucauldian analytical structure is appropriate for several reasons. First, Foucault presents his thoughts, not as a theory of power, but as a way of looking at practices that "transform human beings into subjects" (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983, p. 208). He challenges us to look at the historical patterns and conditions that may influence how we conceptualize knowledge/power. In his afterward to Dreyfus and Rabinow's book, Foucault suggests that we should not study the rationalization of society as much as we should study specific rationalities, noting that there is a link between power and rationalization. He points out that an examination of the resistance points may show us how knowledge circulates, functions, and relates to power (p. 210-211). In the case of strategic planning, this indicates that a study of the rational planning process is not as valuable as an internal view of the rational means people use to define the world of school and schooling.

Second, Foucault's analytic mode modifies the notion of power as a class, race, and gender issue. Instead of a rigid concept of domination/subjugation, Foucault offers an interactive view of power, a power that is "exercised" rather than imposed, noting that "the exercise of power consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome" (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 221). Foucault does not discount domination as an issue. In my view, he highlights the notion of domination when he describes it as coming from below, as something that we are enmeshed in, perhaps even in charge of, if only in an unconscious way.

Participants in strategic planning are exercising what Foucault calls an individualizing and a totalizing form of power (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983, p. 213). In other words, participants are defining or creating knowledge that informs power relations for themselves and others in school settings.

Strategic planning is a participatory practice; including stakeholders in the process is viewed as the key to an effective plan (Cook, 1988, Mauriel, 1989). The application of Foucault's perspective becomes meaningful when we look at the juxtaposition of a diverse group of community participants expressing belief in participatory practices and site-based decision-making, while at the same time they are espousing standardized outcomes and increased regulation. Foucault says, "the exercise of power consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome" (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 221).

Intentionality is the third reason that Foucault is an effective analytic for a study of strategic planning. He describes power as a complex strategical relationship, saying that power relations are intentional and non-subjective (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p.187). In his study of the history of sexuality, he states that our ability to understand this strategic relationship comes from this intentionality. "They are imbued, through and through, with calculation: there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives" (Foucault, 1980, p. 95).

Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983) take the idea one step further and note that "at the local level there is often a high degree of conscious decision making, planning, plotting, and coordination of political activity". They describe a strategic relationship or an exercise of power as a series of "petty calculations, clashes of will, meshing of minor interests" (p. 187) that eventually emerges as a direction, or in this case, a strategic plan .

Strategic plans are very intentional. School district publications collected for this study describe them as "imperatives," "blueprints," "visions" and a "recasting of problems as opportunities." Contained in the evidence of this study, are innumerable examples of the "clashing and meshing of minor interests." The discontinuities found in the parameters, objectives, and strategies are clear examples of Foucault's warning that people may know why they do what they do, but they don't always pay attention to what, what they do, does.

These visible inconsistencies and lack of attention to the actions upon the actions in strategic planning are another reason for applying Foucault's perspective to this rational process. When looking at power relations, he proposes a series of questions that help us examine strategic planning as something more than a rational process or useful product. His questions suggest ways of thinking about how people, when faced with extraordinary conflicts and discontinuities, can view themselves as subject and formulate new kinds of objectified knowledge that reconstruct how they understand and live in their own world. The notion of people as subject is an uncomfortable and arguable point, but Foucault suggests a series of questions that clarify the changing power/knowledge relationships. In his Afterward in Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983), he suggests the examination of:

- The systems of differentiation: Who gets to participate and who is excluded?

- The types of objectives: How is privilege and authority maintained and who will profit?

- The means for bringing the power relations into being: What are the economic structures, the surveillance techniques, the rules of operation and order?

- The institutionalization: How do the power relations become the norm?

•The degrees of rationalization: How are the results guaranteed? (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 223)

At the same time, Foucault (1980) suggests some precautions. Rather than concentrating on the legitimate organizational and regulatory structures, he suggests looking at the outcomes of power at power's ultimate destination or its practices (p. 98-99). I believe that he suggests that we look at how ideas of power become actual lived experience for people. In the case of strategic planning, this would imply looking at how the language becomes a new kind of reality for teachers and students. Foucault makes the point that most struggles revolve around the question, "Who are we?" or more specifically, who are we as individuals in the midst of forms of power that make individual "subject." In the case of strategic planning, this means looking at the standards created within the plan that result in new rules or forms of supervision for educators and students.

Finally, Foucault cautions us against an analysis that looks for the intricate network of power relations, one which hopes to discover the source of the Amazon! Rather, he suggests an analysis which is ascending, looking for the small notions that work their way into a more global discourse of power relations. It then follows that this paper will search for the textual representations of social reconstruction within the strategic plans.

Why are Schools Engaged in Strategic Planning?

The past decade has not been an easy time for educators. Beginning in 1983 with A Nation at Risk, people connected to schools and schooling have faced a barrage of criticism and suggestions for improvement. Since that report was published, over 270 task forces and commissions have worked to "reform" schools (Lewis, 1989). Despite that effort, rarely does a week go by without a news report

of declining test scores, decreasing skills in the workforce, or defeat in international scholastic competition.

For educators, I believe, the persistent messages of ineffectiveness and the proposals for privatization represent the "obstacles and adversity" described by Kaufman and Herman (1991). Politically, the proposed solutions represent an end to or a radical change in the current forms of schooling. The notions of "schools of choice" and "a highly educated workforce" speak to a competitive form of public schooling that does not match the traditions of public education High achievement for all is an oft aspired to and seldom reached goal. I suggest that proposals for national curricula, national achievement tests, and comparative school scores alongside proposals for schools of choice and site-based management leave educators frustrated and confused.

That confusion escalates as reports describe a new era in history, noting the shift from national to global, from industrial to informational, from personal to technological. The rapidly changing global history and economy is coupled with a shrinking job market for the educated middle-class and a declining standard of living for college graduates. For most adults, the notion of a paradigm shift is not dramatic enough to describe the disruption of what we know. Strategic planning then, I posit, becomes a process that appears to improve the payoffs and stave off the competition. It appears to be a process for thinking with the community as opposed to worrying about the community.

This idea of thinking with the community is similar to the societal thinking, discussed by George Herbert Mead, in Mind, Self, and Society (Strauss, 1956). He attempts to expand the notion of individual mind and reflective thought to a concept of a collective mind. He discusses a process of interaction of the self and community that, I believe, corresponds to the stated values of strategic planning:

> Mind, as constructive or reflective or problem-solving thinking, is the socially acquired means for mechanism or apparatus whereby the human individual solves the various problems of environmental adjustment which arise to confront him the course of his experience and which prevent his conduct from proceeding harmoniously on its way until they have been dealt with. (p. 268)

Mead goes on to discuss the discourse between the self and the society that begins to extend or reconstruct the intellectual boundaries. He makes reference to the reconciliation and harmonization of social conflicts that leads not only to modifications of the society, but modifications to the self/individual as well:

> Any such social reconstruction, if it is to be at all far-reaching, presupposes a basis of common social interests shared by all the individual members of the given human society in which that reconstruction occurs, and it is shared by all the individuals whose minds must participate in, or whose minds bring about, that construction. (Strauss, 1956, p. 268-269)

I suggest that the complexity of the political argument about the effectiveness of schooling and the increasing emphasis on the privatization of schools coupled with a dramatically changing world for the adult population leads very naturally to a form of societal problem-solving like strategic planning. It represents a way we can reconcile and harmonize the personal and political conflicts inherent in our world today. For the educator, strategic planning also represents an opportunity to actively and visibly problem-solve with the community. This view is supported by Dennis Mumby (1988) who examines the interrelationship of communication processes and organizing processes. He maintains that "meaning is produced in communication" (p. 14) noting that, over time, the produced meaning becomes habit. In the case of strategic planning, I posit that little

attention is given to what the words really mean to the participants in those schools over time. The remainder of this paper examines that issue.

Data

As a part of a study of school restructuring, 117 strategic plans were collected from school districts and regional educational agencies across the United States. Plans were initially solicited using a mailing list from the American Association of School Administrators. The mailing list was derived from participants in a three day training session on strategic planning co-sponsored by AASA and Bill Cook of the Cambridge Management Group. Participants were designated as "certified strategic planners" by AASA. This initial request to 200 participants resulted in fifty-seven responses.

A second request was sent to chief state school officers in fifty states asking for referrals to districts using the strategic planning process. This request and follow-up mailings yielded the additional sixty documents from a variety of educational agencies and school districts. For the puposes of this study, I focused on 88 plans from K-12 public schools in thirty-two states. Plans from individual school sites, regional agencies, and professional groups were not included in the data. All geographic regions of the country were represented with the largest number of plans coming from the west/northwest (39) and the smallest number received from the east/northeast (16). In addition, a survey and questionnaire were mailed to the contact person in all participating districts. Responses from eighty-seven of those district contacts comprised an additional piece of data analyzed for this study.

The strategic planning documents received from school districts varied a great deal. Many were professionally published packets of material accompanied by glossy brochures which provided a quick overview. Some were composed of three-six-inch-thick

notebooks of detailed material that became a challenge to read and carry. Yet others were informal xeroxed materials that were either in the process of development and use, or the final product of a planning effort that was never completed. The common element in 77.3% of the strategic plans received for this study was their adherence to the planning model promoted by AASA.

Methodology

The 88 plans selected for inclusion in this study were from K-12 school districts within the United States. Plans from regional agencies, individual school sites, and foreign countries were excluded. Each plan was complete with belief statements, a mission statement, and some form of objectives, and strategies. Data were entered on Record Holder, a data management software that has internal search features by category.

To achieve an internal analysis of the plans as a discursive practice, I categorized the belief statements based on common themes found in the language of the statements. Working initially with the first 57 plans, I identified three emergent categories of statements: values, social traditions, and schooling. Values were represented by belief statements that speak to individual value and rights, self-esteem, lifelong learning, quality education, safety, morality, equality, home/family, and communication. The category of social traditions included belief statements about excellence/achievement, democracy/citizenship, community, diversity, cooperation, risk, global society, and career/job preparation. The category of schooling referred to statements about curriculum, instruction, students, teacher/teaching, and organizations. This final category was the most complicated area to develop because of the unusual variety of statements; it also had the fewest number of statements. This framework was then used to analyze the belief statements of all strategic plans.

To understand the realities produced for students, I examined the objectives, parameters, and strategies. Emergent categories included: graduation, post-graduation, achievement/standards, competencies, and curriculum and instruction. All plans were coded for appearance of these terms. In addition, I examined the language within the objectives and strategies for specific terms that represent power/knowledge for students.

Internal analysis of the power/knowledge concept as it appears in practice followed Foucault's (1980) notion that it is found in ways that we accumulate knowledge: "methods of observation, techniques of registration, procedures for investigation and research, apparatuses of control (p. 102). To study this, I developed a matrix to show how the parameters related to the strategies. Strategies were divided into two groups: those written as supportive or positive statements and those written as supervisory or constraining statements.

Limitations

There were three limitations to this study. The plans themselves were objectified notions of people's actions. The deconstruction of the language of the plans was removed from the actors; this represented a major challenge to me as I attempted to address social reconstructions of the power/knowledge relationship within a school community. There was a danger of the analyses defining "truths" and "rules of right" in ways they did not exist in practice. It is important to note that, at this point, no data have been collected to triangulate the analyses.

Another limitation was found in the survey and questionnaire data. The form was sent to and filled out by only one person in each school district. In many cases, this individual was known as the "planning champion" or the person most responsible for the implementation of the strategic plan. Their responses represented a singular and biased perspective. I used the results of this survey

only as another piece of data to inform my questions. I drew no major conclusions from the results.

The other limitation was the thickness of the data. Not only were the plans comprehensive, but the potential for data comparison were vast. The beliefs alone included 1134 statements. For this paper, internal language analyses, by necessity, was limited to the beliefs parameters, objectives and strategies in each plan. Content was narrowed to statements that represented the production of Foucault's notion of truth for students and staff.

Regimes of Truth in Strategic Planning

To understand what Foucault calls "regimes of truth", I looked at how he defined truth and power. He talks about the relationship between power, right, and truth, noting that in society today, we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. He notes that the production of truth today is a highly organized activity (Foucault, 1980, p. 93). I suggest that strategic planning is another formalized mechanism for defining "truth," redefining relations of power, and promoting "rules of right."

Two key aspects of the strategic planning practice contributed to the production of truth: one was the listing of belief statements by the stakeholders and the second was the listing of parameters, the boundaries that govern all future actions of people connected to the system. In his text on strategic planning, Cook (1988) defined belief statements as the articulated moral character of the organization. He asserted that these expressions of values guide the development and evaluation of the rest of the strategic plan and represent "a public declaration of the organization's heart and soul" (p. 99-100). Parameters, according to Cook, are policies that form the boundaries of operation for the organization: things people will always do or things they will never do. Each of these activities becomes a form of "truth" that governs the formation of the rest of the strategic plan. I posit that the parameters and belief

statements represent the "rules of right" and carry explicit and implicit powers that can affect the actions of all school district participants.

There were 1134 belief statements in the 88 strategic plans. When sorted into categories, 948 statements fit general themes and were found in more than one plan. All data were drawn from the 948 statements. Data for the three defined categories, values, social traditions, and schooling, showed a visible, and in my opinion, unusual, imbalance (see Table 1). Beliefs about values comprised 39.2% of the 948 statements, beliefs about social traditions made up 43.9% of the statements, and beliefs about schooling were found in 16.7% of the statements. This imbalance supported my suggestion that strategic planning is an activity for reconciling and harmonizing personal and political conflicts more than it is an activity for improving schooling for students.

To verify that perspective, I again, examined the belief statements for each school district. I color coded the contents of each school district's belief-sets looking for internal consistency. Three types of belief-sets emerged from this analysis which I called (a) the Education of Children, (b) the Rules and Rights of Society, and (c) the Pledge of Commandments (See Table 2). The belief-sets were almost equally divided among these three themes.

Most of the statements in the Education of Children belief-sets referred to learning, teachers, students, curricula, and outcomes. Sample statements drawn from a variety of plans included:

- Schools are responsible for preparing students for post-high school education.
- The mastery of basic skills and the integration of higher order thinking skills are essential elements of effective education.
- Graduation is an essential step for lifelong learning.
- Education for each student must include character development (honesty, courtesy, citizenship).

Generally, the statements lent themselves to specific objectives and strategies for the schooling of children. Thirty strategic plans (34%) had a set of belief statements that spoke to this theme.

The Rules and Rights of Society representedbelief-sets that discussed the relationship between school and society. The statements included references to schooling, students, and learning, but tended to be only generalizations. Examples, again drawn from numerous strategic plans, included:

- Striving for excellence is worth the investment.
- Educated citizens are essential for a democratic society.
- Everyone has the right to an equal opportunity.
- Student learning must be our highest priority.

Belief-sets reflecting this theme were found in 28 (31.8%) of the strategic plans.

The Pledge of Commandments belief-sets have statements that I ascribed to personal convictions or dogma. The texts embodied codes, philosophies, and values about people and behaviors. They were generally written in universal terms. Examples included

- People are fundamentally good.
- Human life is inherently valuable
- Joy is essential to the quality of life.
- There is a Supreme Being that gives purpose and meaning to our lives.
- Knowledge is power.

Thirty strategic plans (34%) had a set of belief statements that, for the most part, werecodes and dogmas. They were the types of statements that are difficult to take public issue with, but within

many communities, are not always universally-held beliefs. Again, I suggest that this activity in strategic planning allowed adults to harmonize their world, but in doing so, they privileged and validated knowledge/power in ways that redefine what we know about schools.

This validation of knowledge, or Foucault's regimes of truth began to emerge in the language of belief statements within the general categories of values, social traditions and schooling (See Tables 3, 4, & 5), . Notions of *excellence* stated as high expectations, maximum potential, and success for all made up the largest number of belief statements. There were only 10 plans of 88 that did not have a statement about excellence, high expectations, or high achievement. Of the 10 plans that did not speak to excellence, high expectation, and high acheivement, nine focused on a theme of Education of Children in their belief-sets (See Table 2). Again, these are the statements that lend themselves to specific objectives and strategies for the schooling of children.

Individual rights commanded the next highest set of belief statements. The data suggested that democracy had a high value, and education was viewed as the foundation of democracy, but individualism was more valued than cooperative efforts, diversity, or equality. One statement contended that "individual freedom is worth defending at all costs." Several other plans stated that "people are motivated primarily by self interest." Only five plans had a statement that the rights and welfare of the group superceded individual rights. The data suggested that we are becoming a nation of people more focused on self and self-interests, a concern heard more frequently in popular press. It was alarming to have this stated so frequently as a "truth" that is a "public declaration of the organization's heart and soul" (Cook, 1988, p. 100).

Statements about *democracy*, for the most part, were limited to the notion that "education is the foundation of a democracy." Only

17 of 88 plans included a belief statement that made a more specific reference to the relationship between democracy and schooling. One school district noted that it will prepare students to participate meaningfully in the commerce, government, and culture of our society; several others listed qualities schools should develop for an educated citizenry.

Other themes related to democracy and schooling were found in statements about cultural diversity, equal access, and equality of opportunity. Only 54 statements reinforced the aforementioned key ideas as beliefs that should guide the development of the strategic plan or influence the education of children (see Tables 3 and 4). I also found it interesting that, despite the media emphasis on a shrinking world, only 19 belief statements referred to a global society. Even when statements about diversity were added, the total of 41 statements represented only 4% of all the belief statements. The silences surrounding these basic tenets of democratic behavior, when viewed from Foucault's notion of interactive power relations, provided a bleak picture of values and beliefs. The silences suggest that knowledge about equality, diversity, and global interdependence was less valued.

Another perspective on the values of people creating strategic plans was found in the parameters. Because the parameters represent boundaries of operation for schools, things people will or will never do, they contribute to the knowledge/power discourse and become truths for students, teachers, and community members. Of the 88 plans reviewed, 27 had no parameters or strategic policy statements. The following analysis is based on the remaining 61 plans.

In my initial examination of the parameters in the strategic plans, I noted a striking similarity in the statements of many school districts. References to participatory management, budget reviews, and instructional outcomes were found in identical form in strategic

plans from across the country. Noting that most of these plans were created in districts that participated in the AASA/Cook certificated workshops and/or used the Cambridge Management consulting service to develop or to facilitate their planning, I reviewed Cook's (1988) text. I found the following examples of parameters, or what he called "strategic policies":

- We will not offer any adult or continuing education courses or programs.
- We will accept no new programs or activities without:
  - (a) a favorable cost-benefit analysis.
  - (b) participation in the development of the program by a representative of all those affected.
  - (c) provisions for staff training.
  - (d) a defined evaluation process.
- We will not tolerate any action or circumstances that degrade any person.
- We will develop educational programs and support services in response to community/student needs, rather than staff availability or competence.
- No student will graduate without demonstrating competency in basic skills.
- We will not allow policies, procedures, or behaviors that impede student success.
- The district attendance policy will be uniformly enforced. (p. 105-106)

I also found guidelines for participatory management that were replicated word for word in this group of plans. They stated:

(1) Those closest to the job know the job better than anyone else.

(2) Strategic information flows downward and operational information flows upward.

(3) Decisions should be made at the lowest appropriate level.

(4) One cannot participate above his or her level of authority, accountability, and information.

(5) Accountability is commensurate with authority. (p. 95)

Of the 51 strategic plans that included parameters, 32 or 63% were close replicas of Cook's examples. Considering that many of these strategic planning groups were facilitated by Cook, his consulting organization, or a Cook trained facilitator, I question the notion of meaningful participation by stakeholders. It appeared that this regime of truth was a widely accepted model of what we always or never do.

Statements about participatory practices were mentioned most often in the plans (see Tables 7 and 8) indicating that this regime of truth will bound actions for people. It is interesting to note that participatory management, or notions of participation, were mandated. This seemed to be an acceptable truth to 45 of the 51 school districts that included parameters.

Other statements that commanded attention included the primacy of instruction over all other activities. These statements usually read: "Nothing will take precedence over the K-12 instructional program." This type of statement was in 38 plans. It was supported by 33 references to "no failure is acceptable."

Finally, there were two other examples of parameters that became new regimes of truth that dramatically affect people in school organizations: schools will not tolerate incompetent employees and schools will employ no one who does not agree with or accept the mission of the district (see Table 8). The latter statement was found in 17 or 33% of the plans that had parameters. It is interesting to note that most of these plans also included a belief statement about accepting individual differences.

Regimes of Truth for Students

When I examined the potential truths for students, I was struck by the limited attention to them in the belief statements (see Table 2 and 5). Although most of the generalizations applied to

students, the contents of the strategic plans spoke more to the needs and interests of adults connected to the school districts. This was not true about the objectives of the plans. Letting the language of the plans speak to me, I noted repeated reference to the term "100%" in objectives and strategies. Further examination found repeated references to a qualifying "all" and quantified percentages for students. I then examine what appeared to me as totalizing language to capture the "regimes of truth" for students.

Of the 72 plans that included objectives, 53 had statements that began: "100% will....," followed by an objective or strategy that affects students (see Table 9). Most statements related to graduation rates, achievement rates, test scores, or post-graduation activities. Twenty-seven school districts committed to graduating 100% of their students; this objective was found in large urban districts as well as small suburban districts. Fifteen districts (30%) guaranteed that 100% of their graduates would be employed or in continuing education within six months of graduation. Students who choose marriage or travel after graduation will certainly challenge the success of these strategic plans. Is the school responsible for determining post-graduate activities of their students? Is the selection and monitoring of these activities a new form of truth for students?

Some of these new regimes of truth were even more complex. One district expected 95% of their students to demonstrate human relations and coping skills. Another set a goal for 100% of the students to demonstrate responsible citizenship and good character. Still another said 100% of the graduates would have high self-esteem by 1995. Indeed, some of the objectives and strategies have the potential to become a new source for adolescent rebellion. By not turning in a portfolio (one district requires 100% of students to voluntarily prepare a portfolio for graduation), not graduating on time, not coping, or not achieving an adequate achievement score, a single student can ruin an entire strategic plan.

Another truth that emerged for students was puzzling. According to the data (see Tables 7, 9, and 10), instruction was a very high priority, students would experience no failure, and they are guaranteed graduation. One district stated that "all students will achieve at their optimal level each day." The specific strategies selected to achieve these goals (see Table 11) included everything from curriculum changes to student Individual Education Plans. Great emphasis was placed on outcome-based learning, drop-out prevention, and performance assessment. Yet, of the 549 strategies categorized from the strategic plans, only 47% of the proposed actions specifically supported instruction. Of the other 53% of the strategies, 14% represented instructional support, such as, staff development, but the other 38% were non-instructional activities. Given these figures, it may be difficult to convince students that 100% of them will graduate, 100% will attain employment or college placement after graduation, and 100% of them will possess positive self-esteem as learners by 1995. What students know about schooling from these strategic plans is a confusing picture, at best.

Power/Knowledge Relations

According to Foucault (1980), power/knowledge relationships can be found in notions of supervision: registration and control that result in actions for and toward people. The rational practices defined by and for people that restructure what we know about schools are located in the relationships between the parameters and strategies in the strategic plans. I focused particularly on the discourse surrounding participatory management and non-instructional activities of schools as examples of social reconstructions of power/knowledge relationships in school communities.

The largest number of parameters (45) or 20% of the 227 defined participatory management as a requirement for the

organization. It is particularly interesting that a participatory, collaborative process was mandated at all levels of each organization. While this power/knowledge relationship bounded the activities of employees in the 45 school districts, only thirteen committed to a strategy to improve communication and fewer yet, (2) identified specific staff training to support this participation.

To gain increased understanding of this issue, I studied the follow-up narrative survey responses and noted that respondents frequently wrote that district decentralization and participatory management were occurring because they were mandated by the plan. Survey results (see Table 16) indicated a high degree of change in power relationships (4.3) but, at the same time, respondents scored value changes, administrative attention, and internal linkages considerably lower (3.6, 2.94, & 3.14). This may be an indicator of the resistance points that Foucault speaks about.

That resistance may be attributed to the language that frames participatory practices in the plans. As noted earlier, most districts adopted the language found in Cook's (1988) model. His description of participatory practices is, for the most part, a standard model of hierarchical relationships. The notions of authority levels and accountability assignments along with defined upper and lower levels may not lend themselves to participatory and collaborative relationships.

In reviewing the relationship of strategies to parameters, it became evident that of the 549 strategies under review, only slightly over 50% (376) spoke to students and staff. Because I had included most strategies that dealt with curriculum, instruction, program development, and the organizational issue of participatory management, I became curious about the remaining 256 strategies. Rereading the data, I discerned extensive attention to business affairs, political and community activities, and marketing phrases (see Table 13). A documentation of these categories produced another dichotomy.

Although the parameters overwhelmingly supported students and instruction, 98 strategies were related to resources, facilities, budgets, and funding. Another 46 strategies dealt with community relations, business partnerships, and public relations. The language identified activities to "assure unity and public support" and communicate "public ownership of the educational programs."

This public ownership for schools and the results of schooling was reflected in a number of places in the data. Almost 24% of the non-instructional strategies (see Table 13) were devoted to gaining community support. Many of these read with qualifiers such as: 100% approval by 1994, or a 5% increase/year in patron support. When coupled with the large number of belief statements about everyone in the community being responsible for the education of children (see Table 3), this effort to gain public attention and support was more understandable. In addition, the knowledge/power implication of the 100% qualifiers for students required a diffusion of responsibility for achievement of these goals and a diffusion of responsibility for a failure to achieve these goals.

More evidence of the quest for public ownership of schooling was seen in the narrative response to the survey question about the value of strategic planning. A majority of respondents identified "the community involvement," or "the opportunity for many voices to be heard" as the most valuable part of the process. Some respondents described the strategic planning process as a "bonding experience," and a "family feeling."

Perhaps the most unusual category to emerge from this review is one I called "capitalistic interests." These 29 strategies specified markets, promoted competition, and defined world class status. Terminology like "market niche" and "market-driven curriculum" were found in these statements. One district defined a plan to "entice non-residents"; another discussed "free market two-way choice educational programs"; still another targeted a plan to

"market district products and services that generate revenue." This data supported my position that strategic planning was used to create an image of "schools of choice" within a public system. What are the power/knowledge implications of market-driven public schools within school districts and among neighboring school districts? This discursive practice reconstructs an understanding of public schools.

The study of parameters, the agreed upon boundaries for the mission of the school district, and the strategies, the actions for achieving the objectives, was one of the more interesting analyses of this paper. Of the 325 parameters identified, 227 or 70% refer to students and certificated staff. It appeared that rules and boundaries were essential for the people in school. It is also interesting to note in Tables 14 and 15 that some parameters had few strategies that supported or supervised implementation. This was particularly true in the areas of equity, safety, collaboration, and staff support of the mission.

Required support of the district strategic plan was perhaps the most frightening result of this discursive practice. I found this parameter in only nine of the plans analyzed but even this limited appearance of boundary to discourse is distressing. Several districts stated that they would not hire anyone who did not support their strategic plan; another indicated that staff would be evaluated for their support of the plan. Survey narratives extended this singular perspective beyond individuals to the schools in the district. Respondents noted that decentralization was occurring because of the strategic plan, but qualified most statements by noting that all site activities and decisions "must be in harmony with the district plan," and "they must live within the parameters of the district plan." I seriously question the effectiveness of participatory practices in an environment that requires total harmony and adherence to district rules of right. Once again, what

we know about schooling in a democratic society undergoes social reconstruction.

Conclusion

I undertook this study to look at strategic planning as a discursive practice: a way in which members of the school community not only define their world, but redefine the power relationships within that world. I believe that the language of strategic plans not only creates what constitutes notions of schooling, education, teaching, learning, and success, but, eventually, the language of the plans solidifies practices and power relationships that surround these notions. "The plan," becomes the subject and the practices and people become the objects. In his discussion of the creation of organization ideology, Mumby (1988) suggests that, "In an organizational context, communication is the process through which meaning is created and, over time, sedimented" (p. 14). The critical question for me is, over time, will anyone remember that a selected group of people made these plans? Will the requirements for adherence and support silence questions and differences in ways that are less than democratic? Will the highly defined mission statements and very specific beliefs and parameters confine creativity and innovation in ways we never imagined?

Is strategic planning a worthwhile effort? If survey results and time and money investments are the measure, the answer is unequivocally, yes. For me, the answer is less clear. I fully support practices that increase participation in schools and schooling. However, I question whether strategic planning, in most cases, has resulted in increased democratic practices for school communities. I also question whether participants have addressed fundamental beliefs about schools and schooling, particularly when I examine the discontinuities in the beliefs and actions. A strategic plan does diffuse ownership for the problems and solutions for educating a society. Strategic planning also represents developing schools of

choice; patrons do have an opportunity to have voice in the kind of schools they want. For all participants, parents, business leaders, patrons, teachers, support staff, and administrators, strategic planning is an opportunity to have a conversation to determine the "truth" of local schooling practices. Once complete, a new harmony is in place. An agreement, at least on paper, is reached about the purpose and outcomes of schooling.

So what has this enormous investment in community conversation accomplished? As I see it, the success of strategic planning has been what Mead calls "societal problem-solving." The external and internal analysis gives all participants an opportunity to discuss and bemoan the dramatic changes in society. Defining beliefs, missions, and parameters allows planning teams to create new boundaries and expectations for schools, schooling, and educators and present them as common interests. Agreement on objectives and the accompanying strategies and action plans diffuses responsibility for schooling practices. Once adopted, "the plan" defines practices, behaviors, and expectations. "The plan" cannot be fired, rewarded, or disciplined but it has the power to fire, reward, and discipline. In some cases, to disagree with "the plan" is to be insubordinate or disloyal. If this is the message we are sending to the future and these plans define the productive citizen for the 21st century, I submit that the place we are going to will be less democratic, less creative, and less educated.

Recommendations

This paper is an overture to a more comprehensive study about strategic planning. It represents a thoughtful wrestling with the published words in strategic plans and the comments of a single participant in a school district process. I do not suggest that the activity of strategic planning is useless. If anything, the questions I raise are intended to direct a more specific internal analysis of the actual practices that represent power relations for people connected to the language of these plans. My questions also offer Foucault's

caution to educators who are about to direct a planning process: Think carefully about what, what you do, does. What message, indeed, do our children carry forward?

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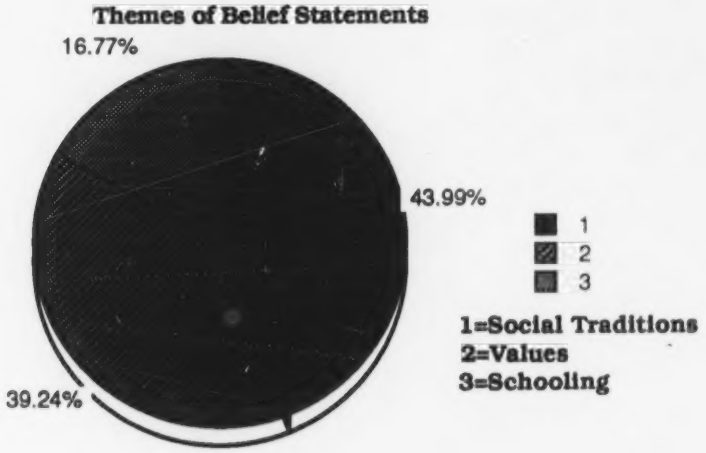
Table 1



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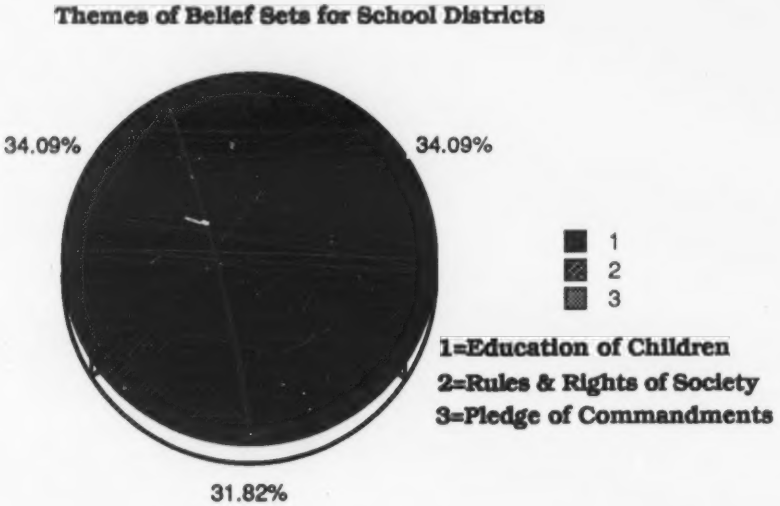

Table 3

Belief Statements: Social Traditions

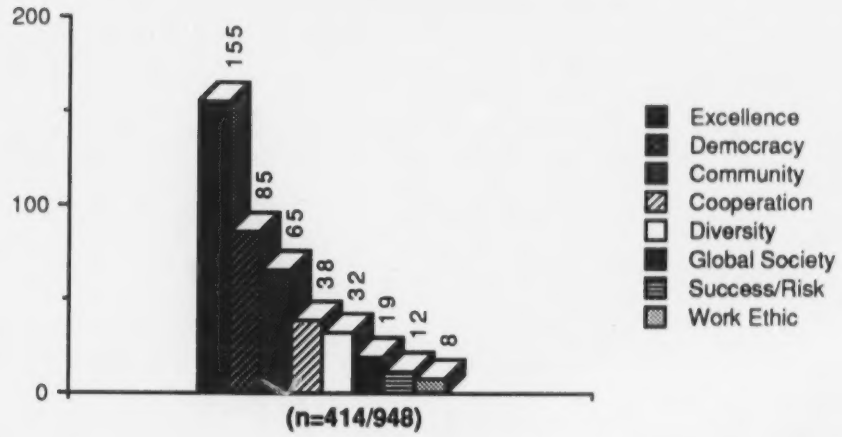

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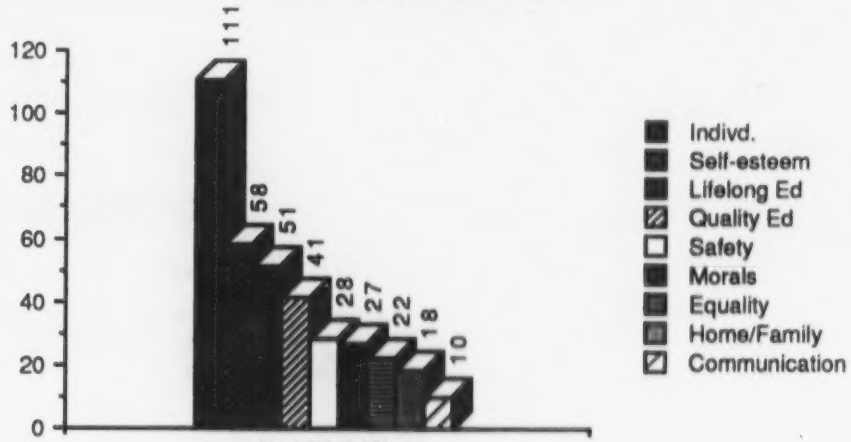
Table 4

Belief Statements: Values



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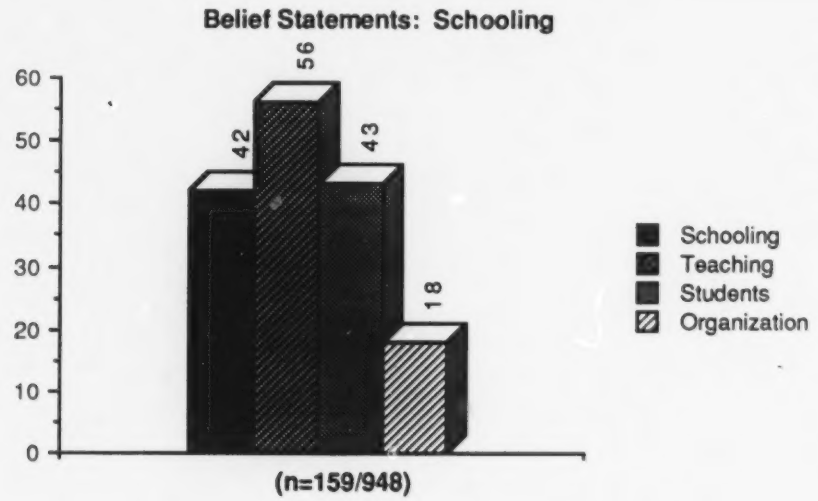

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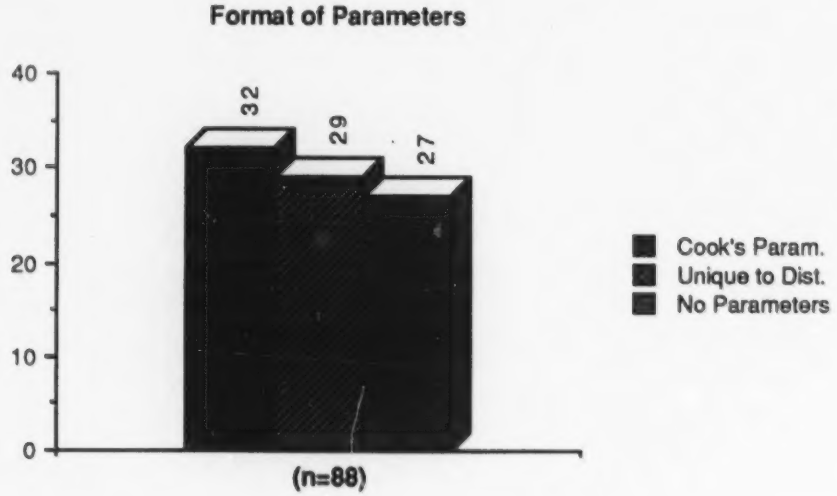

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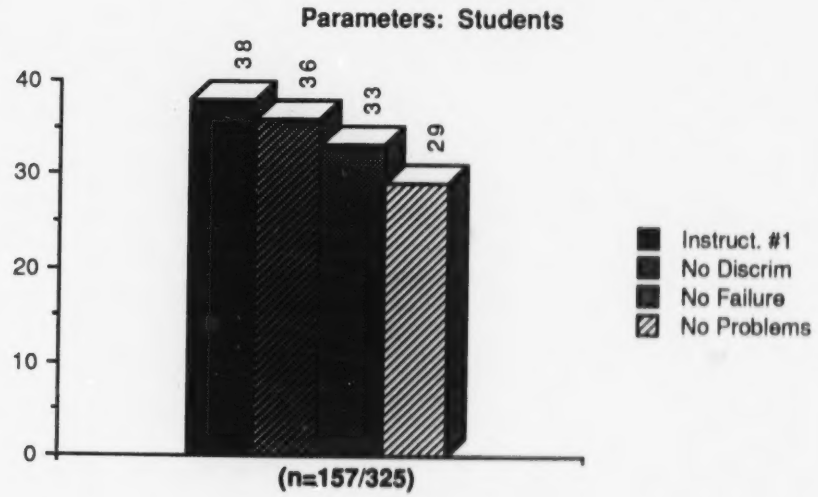

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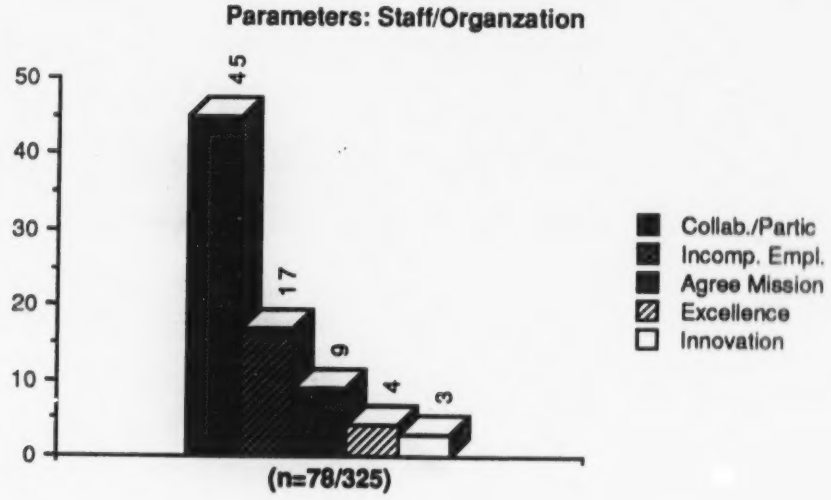

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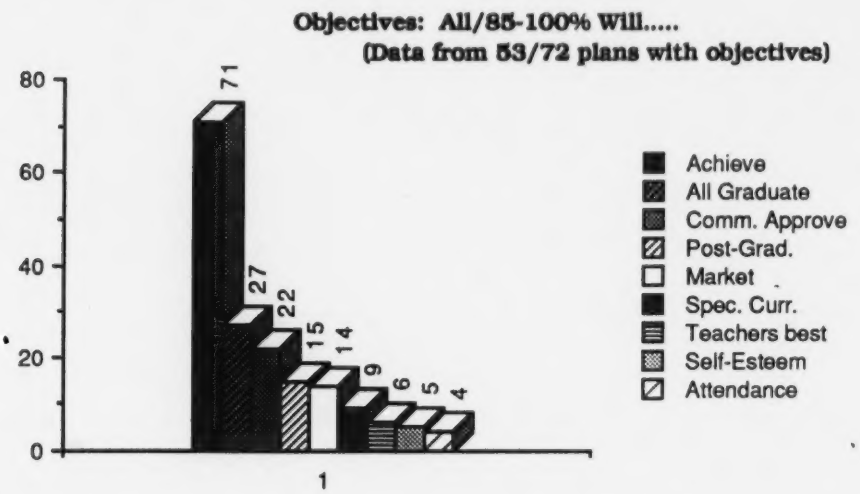

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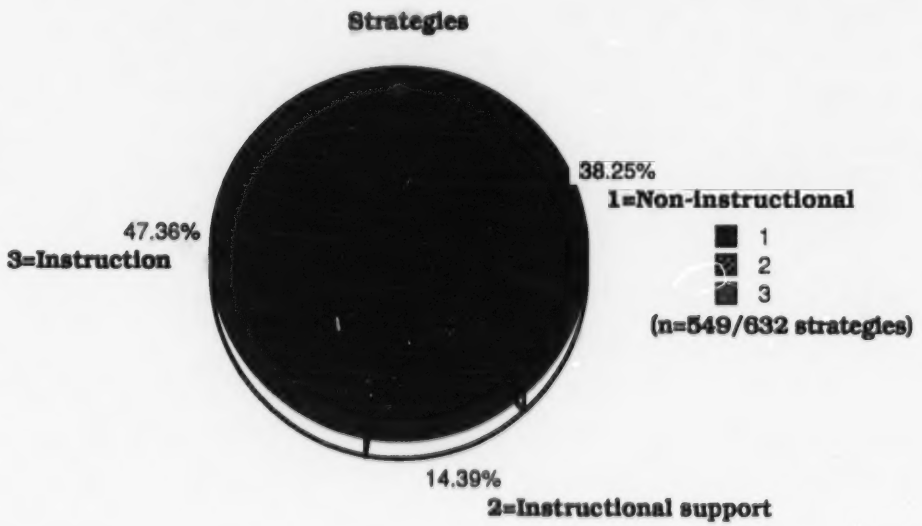


Table 11

Strategies: Instruction

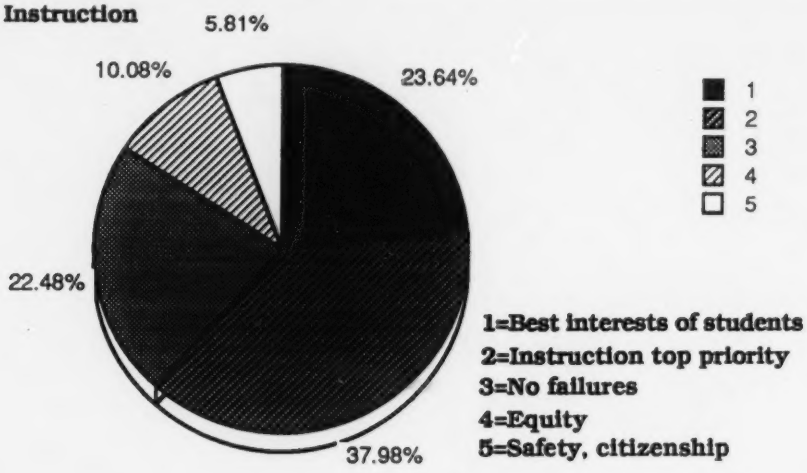


Table 12

Instructional Support

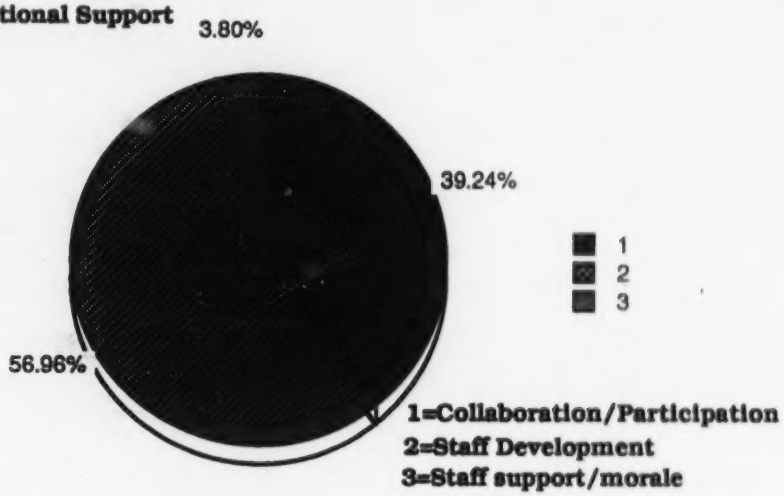
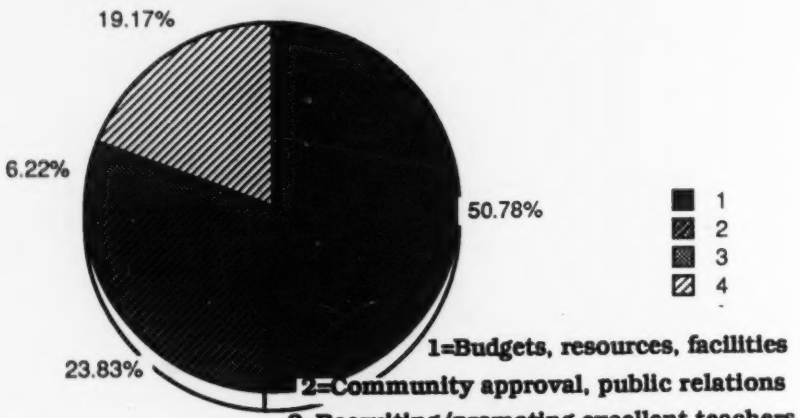


Table 13

Non-instructional Strategies



1=Budgets, resources, facilities
2=Community approval, public relations
3=Recruiting/promoting excellent teachers
4=Marketing

Table 14

Parameters in Relation to Strategies: Students

Parameters	Supportive Strategy	Supervising/ Constraining Strategy
All decisions in best interests of students **21** parameters	Involve parents Counseling & guidance Extend day/age for program Multi-age groups Involve students in decisions **53** strategies	Specialized learning centers for problems Programs for tracking graduates Select psychological services **8** strategies
Instruction is a top priority **38** parameters	New curriculum Add technology New teaching strategies Thinking skills Increase time Increase basics **54** strategies	Outcome-based/mastery learning Goal-based assessment Align curriculum Uniform standards Increase test scores **44** strategies
No Failures Standards for achievement **33** parameters	Reward excellence Promote wellness Flexible programs Redefine graduation standards Homework assistance Guaranteed diploma **28** strategies	Individual Education Plan Drop-out/At-risk intervention % at or above grade level on test scores Data-base of student records to monitor progress **30** strategies
Equity/Access **36** parameters	Practice social responsibility Guarantee access to curriculum Nurturing environment **26** strategies	
Safety No problems or interference with learning **29** parameters	Citizenship, respect emphasized Develop, guarantee self-esteem Guarantee safety Drug-free environment **15** strategies	Program to house behavior problems Special psychological services. **2** strategies

Table 15

Parameters in Relation to Strategies: Staff

Parameters	Supportive Strategy	Supervising/ Constraining Strategy
Collaboration/ Participatory Management **45** parameters	Improve communication Practice participatory decision-making Involve staff in staff development planning Have in-service to support part. managmt. **29** strategies	Responsibility/ Accountability **2** strategies
No ineffective employees **17** parameters	Staff development to improve student achievement Supervision to improve profession **26** strategies	Develop staff data base Outcome-base staff development Only retain/hire effective employees Perfect standards of accountability New evaluation system Measure progress regularly identify all incompetent teachers **19** strategies
Staff will support our mission **9** parameters	Challenge ourselves to achieve staff support **3** strategies	Evaluate support of mission and objectives **3** strategies
Support excellence **4** parameters	Recruit and retain the best Salary exceed natl average Teacher resource center Creative staffing plan Recognition programs **30** strategies	Tenure only those who get highest ratings Raise job performance indicators Performance-based compensation **5** strategies
Support innovation **3** parameters	Staff spend time in other career fields **2** strategies	

SURVEY NARRATIVE QUESTIONS

Please provide brief (several word, 1-2 sentence) responses:
(All responses will be kept anonymous. Individual districts will not be identified)

1. What were some of the difficulties and unexpected problems your district faced in preparing for and conducting this process?

2. Was the planning process adapted to meet the unique needs of your district? If so, how?

3. Was an external or internal facilitator employed? Would you make the the decision to use an external facilitator again? Why or why not?

4. Why was strategic planning undertaken? Where did the impetus come from to begin the process?

5. What effect, if any, has the process had on labor relations within the district?

6. Did your district have a planning "champion," someone who took ownership for the process and worked actively to make it succeed (other than an external paid facilitator)? If so, what is his or her position title? (There may be more than one person in this category).

7. Can you give an example of a decision made on the basis of the strategic plan which might have been made differently in the absence of the plan?

8. Can individual school sites modify or adapt the plan? If so, which elements can they adapt?

9. Do you believe the plan will lead to greater centralization or decentralization of decision making in your district? Why?

10. Which elements of the planning process were most valuable, least valuable? Why?

Please continue on the opposite side →

SA = Strongly Agree
A = Agree
N = No Opinion, or No Strong Feeling
D = Disagree
SD = Strongly Disagree
NI = No Information, or Inadequate Information to Answer This Question.

TABLE 16

							Mean
1. The overall effect of strategic planning on the district has been positive.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NI	3.79
2. Strategic planning has strengthened the links between different units within the district.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NI	3.14
3. The strategic planning process has helped focus the attention of district administrators on what is important for the district's future.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NI	2.94
4. The strategic planning process has helped focus the attention of key community decision makers on what is important for the district's future.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NI	3.81
5. The strategic plan will likely lead primarily to incremental improvement in practice, rather than restructuring of the district.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NI	3.70
6. The strategic plan will likely lead primarily to restructuring of the district, rather than incremental improvement in practice.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NI	4.25
7. The process of preparing employees and patrons for strategic planning was successful.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NI	3.88
8. How do you believe each of the following groups would react to the statement: *The strategic planning process has been positive.*							
Board of Education	SA	A	N	D	SD	NI	3.99
Principals	SA	A	N	D	SD	NI	3.57
Teachers (generally)	SA	A	N	D	SD	NI	4.05
Parents (generally)	SA	A	N	D	SD	NI	3.51
Community leaders (generally)	SA	A	N	D	SD	NI	2.88
9. How do you believe each of the following groups would react to the statement: *The strategic plan is likely to lead to significant improvements in the school district.*							
Board of Education	SA	A	N	D	SD	NI	3.7
Principals	SA	A	N	D	SD	NI	4.1
Teachers (generally)	SA	A	N	D	SD	NI	3.5
Parents (generally)	SA	A	N	D	SD	NI	4.3
Community leaders (generally)	SA	A	N	D	SD	NI	3.8
10. Labor relations have improved as a result of the planning process.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NI	4.3
11. The strategic plan embodies new or different values for our district.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NI	3.6
12. The strategic plan will encourage changes in power relationships within the district.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NI	4.3
13. The strategic plan will lead to significant changes in instructional practices.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NI	3.5
14. This district perceives planning as a rational process which helps reduce a complex future into a set of manageable tasks.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NI	3.6
15. The goals set forth in the plan will be achieved within the allotted period of time by employing strategies stated in the action plans.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NI	3.6
16. The plan will lead to improved student learning outcomes.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NI	4.05

Please continue on the opposite side →

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